United Nations A/HRC/39/NGO/129

General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 September 2018
English only

Human Rights Council
Thirty-ninth session
10-28 September 2018
Agenda item 4
Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the International Federation of Journalists, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2018]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

GE.18-14476(E)
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The International Federation of Journalists' Written Statement to the 39th Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council on Somalia

The International Federation of Journalists and its Somalia affiliate, the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ) wish to draw the attention of the UN Human Rights Council about the all-out war to suppress the twin rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association in Somalia, and to appeal on the current session of the Council to send a clear message to Somalia's leaders that human rights violations – both past and ongoing – will not go unpunished.

During and after previous UN Human Rights Council sessions, attacks on journalists have been unrelenting. The IFJ and its affiliate NUSOJ have documented extensive violations of freedom of expression and freedom of association for the past 7 years. The authorities in Somaliland (the administration controlling northwest regions of Somalia) have intensified the attacks on media freedom since the start of the conflict about the disputed territory in Tukaraq with Puntland (regional state controlling north-eastern regions of Somalia), where 6 journalists have been arrested, more than 10 journalists forced into exile, two television networks had their licences withdrawn and one newspaper was banned. Four other journalists were arrested in separate incidents in Hargeisa and Borame.

On 26 July, journalist Abdirisaq Qasim Iman, a cameraman for privately owned Somali Broadcasting Services (SBS), was murdered in broad day light by a policeman, a sobering reminder of risks faced by journalists in Mogadishu. The suspected killer absconded from the crime scene and he has not been arrested for this cold blood killing. This is the most blatant case of security forces involved in a journalist's killing and covering up the crime to shield killers from accountability.

Notwithstanding public pledges to restore rule of law and independent justice system that people have faith in, personalities with records of human rights' violations against journalists and trade unions continue to hold positions of power and to curtail freedom of expression and freedom of association directly and indirectly, by deliberate and unwarranted attacks on the trade union. These include orchestrating abusive prosecutions of journalists for exercising their fundamental rights, inciting stalking by security forces of prominent press freedom defenders and manipulating independent media by allocating monthly payments to media houses, thus making critical and independent reporting almost non-existent.

In order to provide a rationale for the suppression of journalists' rights and trade union freedoms, the authorities are engaging in a deliberate drive of character assassination and smear campaign in Somalia with a view to discrediting, de-legitimising and destroying the outspoken and independent voices of journalists and trade union movement who brave oppressive forces within the Somali government and their accomplices by documenting and exposing human rights' violations, and seeking protection from international human rights mechanisms.

Impunity in Somalia is further reinforced by the brazen continuing failure to comply with directives of the UN's human rights mechanisms, in particular gross encroachment on - and contempt of - the decisions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) concerning egregious violations of freedom of association and trade union rights, as well as the failure to address serious concerns by the UN's human rights special procedures, both privately and publicly, on weighty abuses of human rights against journalists and trade union movement, which were recently criticised by the European Parliament.

The IFJ and NUSOJ consider that the routine attacks of journalists and trade union activists through denying them the right and space to defend basic rights, inhibiting of freedom of association and demolishing of independent union organising & functioning, coupled with smear campaign and stigmatisation is tantamount to systematic repression of their rights and freedoms.

In light of the above concerns, IFJ and NUSOJ call on the UN Human Rights Council to urge the Somali Federal Government to:

1. Establish an independent judicial mechanism with a special counsel to investigate violations and abuses of human rights, particular attacks on journalists' safety, clampdown on freedom of association and violations of internation: human rights mechanism, to ensure all those responsible for human rights violations and abuses – including tnose holding positions in the Somali government now – are brought before this commission to determine the truth, renc . justice and end impunity;

2. Cease all hostile acts, both (irect and indirect, against independent journalists, critical media houses and free trade unions who express dissen ng opinions over the current situation of the country, including important severe human rights concerns, star.ing by breaking with the past human rights abuses;

3. Respect and preserve international human rights law and system, including International Labour Standards, by executing in good faith decisions such as those from the ILO and recommendations from UN human rights mandate holders by establishing a national system that embodies human rights culture so as to prevent further violations;

4. Ensure journalists and trade union activists can exercise their right to freedom of expression and association, and are able to carry out their peaceful work without fear of reprisal;